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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MEXICO 000536

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SUBJECT: JESUS ORTEGA: AMLO CAMPAIGN INSIDER OR OUTSIDE
LOOKING IN?

Summary

¶1. (U) On 01/24, Poloffs and WHA/MEX Deputy Director met with Jesus Ortega, campaign coordinator for Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO), to discuss the upcoming campaign agenda, what effect the continued public infighting between the Democratic Revolutionary Party's (PRD) Mexico City factions was having on the party's unity and AMLO's campaign, and what were his concerns leading into this summer's election. Although he seemed to have a grasp of the themes covered, it became apparent Ortega may not be completely informed on all aspects of the campaign. It is likely, considering the growing divisions within the party, that Ortega's nomination to campaign coordinator serves only to placate his faction within the PRD. End Summary.

Problems? What Problems?

¶2. (SBU) Poloffs and WHA/MEX Deputy Director were interested to hear Ortega's position on the public infighting taking place between the PRD's Mexico City factions. An apparently sour subject (Ortega lost the party's nomination for Mexico City mayor to AMLO-protégé Marcelo Ebrard), Ortega grudgingly admitted that the fighting was a concern for the campaign but that they were working to get it under control. He discarded any insinuation that the fallout from all the bickering will split the party or threaten the stability of the PRD's alliance with the Worker's Party (PT) and Convergence Party (Convergencia).

¶3. (SBU) Regarding the campaign itself, a more confident Ortega explained that AMLO's strong support in Southern Mexico will shift the campaign's focus to the center and north of the country. Of the three main contenders, he claimed, AMLO was in the best position. According to Ortega, April polls are the most significant of the campaign season. At that stage, it is practically impossible for the third place candidate to gain more votes, and the contest becomes a two-person race with support for candidate number three being split among the two frontrunners. AMLO cannot lose as long as he maintains his eight to ten point lead in the polls, he declared. Ortega continued, stating that Roberto Madrazo of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) suffers from too many internal problems and little support from PRI governors in the North. He believes a growing battle over the party's candidate list for congress will erupt in April when the lists are finalized and create a break in the PRI with conservative members supporting Felipe Calderon and the more liberal members moving toward AMLO. Finally, Ortega commented that Felipe Calderon of the National Action Party (PAN) is running on "fake" support. He noted that Calderon's opening day campaign rally in Mexico's main bullfighting ring, where all PAN candidates launch their campaigns, did not fill the stadium, a bad omen in his view. He accused the PAN of exaggerating Calderon's support, but did admit that of the two Calderon would be AMLO's biggest threat. For that

threat to materialize, however, Ortega explained that Calderon must first consolidate his party's support, steal conservative votes from within the PRI, and focus heavily on independent voters.

Trail Talk

¶4. (SBU) Ortega provided a more detailed explanation of AMLO's three-stage campaign strategy. The first stage, he said, focuses on AMLO the leader - fully supported by and in control of his alliance and ready to govern. The second stage, scheduled for March through May, will focus on AMLO the team player - appearing at alliance campaign events to support senate and federal deputy candidates. The final stage, according to Ortega, will focus on closing the election out in June. This stage, he explained, is still up in the air and will be directed primarily by polling results in April and May.

¶5. (SBU) Ortega brushed over a few of AMLO's platform positions, repeating a number of points made by AMLO during breakfast with the Ambassador the day before, especially AMLO's immigration/economic proposal (septel). We explained that immigration, and more importantly the "regularization" of Mexicans in the United States, was a domestic, congressional affair and not something that could be negotiated. We proposed that Mexico's role should be geared more toward controlling its border and emphasizing all legal migration tools. Ortega appeared to understand our position and noted he would discuss it with others.

Comment

¶6. (SBU) Although he appeared fully briefed on campaign and platform issues, Ortega was surprised to hear the meeting

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between AMLO and the Ambassador had already taken place. This was not the only sign Ortega, as the supposed campaign coordinator, did not know what was going on. When presenting his business card, Ortega noted he held a private office outside the campaign headquarters but offered no further explanation. He also acknowledged that he was not traveling with AMLO on the campaign trail nor was he participating in AMLO's morning television infomercials - a major campaign component. It is possible Ortega's title serves only to placate his faction of the PRD (which represents the majority of the party), and he has no real campaign responsibilities. According to other PRD contacts, Ortega was asked to step down in the PRD's most recent election to chose the party president in order to make room for AMLO-favorite Leonel Cota. In exchange, Ortega was told he could run unobstructed for the party's nomination for Mexico City mayor. That was not to be, however, as party leaders again pressured Ortega to step aside to make room for AMLO-protege Marcelo Ebrard. Ortega did not back down, but eventually lost to Ebrard in a December 4 internal election. It is unclear at this time what Ortega's role really is within the campaign and whether or not he will serve as a good point of contact for the campaign. End Comment.

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